



TOWN OF ROCKPORT

SHARK SIGHTING AND SHARK ATTACK POLICY AND PROCEDURE

POLICY

The Town of Rockport is dedicated to providing a safe and enjoyable environment for all residents and visitors. As a coastal community, we recognize the desire for people to visit our beaches and spend time in and on the water. Rockport is home to many boaters, kayakers, swimmers, scuba divers, surfers, and fishermen that utilize the ocean surrounding our Town. It is imperative that everyone understands the need to practice good safety measures and be vigilant for the potential dangers presented by ocean inhabitants.

Sharks present an unpredictable danger in ocean waters. In recent years, the shark population has increased in the Northeast, due in large part to the presence of seals as a food source. Where there are seals, you must assume there may be sharks. Each person who enters the ocean waters must do so with a level of caution and be alert for indicators of potential shark activity. The following notification and safety procedures will provide useful guidelines for response to shark sightings and if one occurs, a shark attack. Town of Rockport Departments will continue to work collaboratively to enhance safety and the effectiveness of our response to situations that occur.

DEFINITIONS

Confirmed Shark Sighting: The visual confirmation of a shark in the water by a Town lifeguard or public safety official; sighting by multiple people at the same time, or other credible person(s) as determined by public safety officials.

Documentation of Sighting: Includes videos, still photographs, and/or written statements of witnesses to a shark sighting/attack.

Unconfirmed Shark Sighting: The visual reporting of a shark in the water by a person who does not have any specific knowledge of shark activity or whose sighting cannot be confirmed by another source or related information.

Public Safety Official: A Town of Rockport employee in the Ambulance Department; Fire Department; Harbormaster; Lifeguard Program, or Police Department.

Rockport Control Dispatch Center: The central point of communication for all Town Public Safety Departments to ensure coordination of effort and effective response. All notifications of shark sightings/attacks will be routed through the Rockport Control Dispatch Radio System. If a phone is used to contact the dispatch center, the phone number to be used is 978-546-1212.

Rockport Control Dispatch Radio Alert: The public safety radio notification to all public safety officials monitoring the radio of the specific shark activity, to include the location and nature of activity and what resources are needed.

Shark Activity Alert List: The list of Town Departments and specific Town employees to be notified in the event of a shark sighting/attack. The first notification of a sighting and/or attack is always to the Rockport Control Dispatch Center in order to initiate the appropriate emergency response.

Shark Activity Alert Notification (SAAN): The immediate notification from Rockport Control Dispatch to members on the Shark Activity Alert List of the shark activity and specific nature of such activity.

Town Swimming Beach: The designated Town beaches where swimming is commonplace and lifeguards are stationed during set hours. These beaches include Front Beach, Old Garden Beach, Cape Hedge Beach and Long Beach.

Water Closure: The prohibition of swimming in a body of water due to shark sighting/attack. The closure will remain in effect until lifted by a lifeguard and/or public safety official depending on the circumstances.

PROCEDURE

A. CONFIRMED SHARK SIGHTING REPORT

- 1.) The lifeguard or public safety official that observes the shark or receives the shark sighting/attack information will immediately signal all swimmers, surfers, and beachgoers to exit the water immediately. The lifeguard or public safety official will then notify the Rockport Control Dispatch Center via portable radio or phone, if a radio is unavailable. The initial information provided to the Dispatcher should include:
 - Location of the shark activity;
 - Nature of such activity (i.e. shark sighting, shark attack, shark feeding on marine life, etc.);
 - Number of people (if any) involved;
 - Whether there are injuries and the severity of such injuries;
 - Type of emergency services needed (Harbormaster, EMS, Police);
 - Time such shark activity was observed;
 - How far from shore the shark was observed;
 - Size of the shark if at all possible to determine, and
 - Location shark was last seen.

NOTE: The only exception to the above directive of ordering everyone to exit the water is if the shark sighting/attack is at Front Beach and there are people on the swim float anchored off shore. If there is a shark in the water at Front Beach and people are on the swim float, they should remain on the float or if in close proximity to the float swim to it for safety. The Harbormaster will be contacted and can safely take people from the float back to land.

- 2.) Once all people have exited the water, the lifeguard or public safety official should scan the beach to ensure that everyone is out of the water and there are no injured persons on the beach.
- 3.) The Rockport Control Dispatch Center will broadcast a general alert over the radio to notify on-duty public safety officials of the shark sighting/attack; the location and nature of the incident, and any resources needed. The Dispatcher/Desk Officer will then notify the individuals on the Shark Activity Alert List. A selected Town Official will evaluate the information to determine if the information received should be considered a confirmed sighting and what additional steps should be taken.
- 4.) If the sighting was made by a lifeguard or a third person that is then confirmed by a lifeguard/public safety official, the Harbormaster should be immediately dispatched to the area to assess the situation from the water and provide their observations.
- 5.) The lifeguard should utilize binoculars to attempt to locate the shark and maintain a visual for the Harbormaster upon their arrival into the area.
- 6.) Based upon the seriousness of the situation, police personnel may be respond to the beach and assist the lifeguard and/or EMS personnel.
- 7.) The lifeguard will notify the Lifeguard Program Supervisor of the incident.
- 8.) The lifeguard will document the incident in an Incident Report and submit it to the Desk Officer prior to the end of their assigned shift.

B. UNCONFIRMED SHARK SIGHTING REPORT

- 1.) If an unconfirmed shark sighting is received, lifeguards and public safety officials will take whatever steps necessary to confirm such report. These steps may include the following:
 - Interviewing the reporting person and obtaining additional information;
 - Receiving additional reports consistent with the original reporting person's account of the sighting, and

- Examination of video, still photographs or other evidence of the sighting (ex. deceased marine life in the area of reported shark activity).
- 2.) If the status of an unconfirmed sighting is changed to a confirmed sighting, all appropriate information as listed in Section A, 1.), shall be obtained and communicated to all lifeguards by the Rockport Control Dispatch Center.

C. SHARK ATTACK REPORT

Confirmed Shark Attack

- 1.) Notify the Rockport Control Dispatch Center for EMS, Fire Department, Harbormaster, and Police Department response.
- 2.) The lifeguard and/or public safety official will ensure all people exit the swimming area immediately to minimize the chance of additional victims.
- 3.) Do not enter the water unless it is safe to do so. A lifeguard/public safety official's instinct is to respond and help the victim, but creating a situation where you are also in jeopardy just increases the complexity for first responders. Use your skills and training from a position of safety as best you can.
- 4.) Be prepared to render emergency first aid for serious, life threatening injuries involving massive bleeding and shock.
- 5.) Maintain communication with the Rockport Control Dispatch Center so that emergency first responders can get to you as quickly as possible.

D. WATER CLOSURE

Confirmed Shark Sighting

For all confirmed shark sightings regardless of their distance from the beach, the lifeguard(s) on the affected beach(s) will place the Purple Shark Flag alerting the public that a shark has been seen in the water.

- 1.) If the confirmed sighting was estimated to be over three hundred (300) hundred yards from a Town swimming beach, then no beach water closure is required. The water area should be monitored by the lifeguard(s) present with the use of binoculars and the Harbormaster should be dispatched to surveil the area from the water.

- 2.) If the confirmed sighting was estimated to be between two hundred (200) to three hundred (300) yards from a Town swimming beach, then the lifeguard should signal an alert to swimmers and beachgoers that a shark(s) has been spotted in the area and they should use caution and not venture out too far. The water area should be monitored by the lifeguard(s) present with the use of binoculars and the Harbormaster should be dispatched to surveil the area from the water.
- 3.) If the confirmed sighting was estimated to be between one hundred (100) to two hundred (200) yards from a Town swimming beach, then the lifeguard should signal an alert to swimmers and beachgoers that a shark has been spotted close to the area and everyone must exit the water. This water closure will remain in effect for at least one (1) hour from the last time the shark(s) was observed unless otherwise determined by Town Officials. The water area should be monitored by the lifeguard(s) present with the use of binoculars and the Harbormaster should be dispatched to surveil the area from the water. Lifeguards on all Town Beaches will be notified of the water closure at the specified beach.
- 4.) If the confirmed sighting was estimated to be less than one hundred (100) yards from the Town swimming beach, then the lifeguard should signal an alert to swimmers and beachgoers that a shark has been spotted in the immediate area and everyone must exit the water. This water closure will remain in effect for at least two (2) hours from the last time the shark(s) was observed unless otherwise determined by Town Officials. The water area should be monitored by the lifeguard(s) present with the use of binoculars and the Harbormaster should be dispatched to surveil the area from the water. Lifeguards on all Town Beaches will be notified of the water closure at the specified beach.
- 5.) If the confirmed sighting on one beach is in close proximity to another beach (i.e. shark sighting on Long Beach), then the lifeguard on the neighboring beach (i.e. Cape Hedge Beach) must assess the safety of their water area and clear the water of swimmers, surfers, etc. as appropriate.
- 6.) All water closures will be communicated from the lifeguard or public safety official to the Rockport Control Dispatch Center so the information can be tracked in a Call Number through the records management system. When a water area is reopened, the lifeguard/public safety official shall notify the Rockport Control Dispatch Center so it can be indicated in the Call Number.
- 7.) If the confirmed sighting is on Long Beach, the Rockport Control Dispatch Center will notify the Gloucester Police Department of the sighting, so they can alert their lifeguards on the appropriate beaches.

Shark Attack

- 1.) If a shark attack occurs on a human, the water area where the attack occurred will be closed and will not be reopened until approval is received from the Chief of Police and Board of Selectmen.

E. REOPENING OF WATER AREA

- 1.) The affected water area(s) will be reopened to swimmers, surfers, etc. after the following periods of time have elapsed unless determined otherwise by Town Officials:
 - Shark sighting is between 100 yards to 200 yards from a Town Swimming Beach = Water Closure of 1 hour from the time of the last shark sighting;
 - Shark sighting is less than 100 yards from a Town Swimming Beach = Water Closure of 2 hours from the time of the last shark sighting, and
 - Shark attack on a human = water area will be closed immediately and not reopened until approval is received from the Chief of Police and the Board of Selectmen.

F. SHARK ACTIVITY ALERT NOTIFICATION ("SAAN")

- 1.) Upon notification of shark activity, the Rockport Control Dispatch Center will immediately notify the Town employees listed as primary contacts on the **Shark Activity Alert List**.
- 2.) The SAAN will be made and include as much detailed information listed in Section A, 1.), as possible, so a decision can be made as to the next steps to take for public safety.
- 3.) Individuals contacted through the SAAN will be documented in the Call # for the incident.

G. SHARK ACTIVITY ALERT LIST

- 1.) The primary contacts for the Shark Activity Alert List are the following Town positions:
 - a.) All Lifeguards (if not already notified based on initial report);
 - b.) On-Duty Police Sergeant / Officer-in-Charge;
 - c.) Harbormaster;
 - d.) Lifeguard Program Supervisor;
 - e.) Police Lieutenant;
 - f.) Chief of Police;
 - g.) Town Administrator, and
 - h.) Assistant Town Administrator.

- 2.) The Rockport Control Dispatch Center and/or On-Duty Sergeant/OIC will notify each person in the order listed above for a.), through f.). The Chief of Police will notify the Town Administrator and Assistant Town Administrator.

H. OTHER TOWN WATER AREAS

- 1.) The areas referenced in this policy and procedure are identified as Town Swimming Beaches. Additional areas in Town attract swimmers, scuba divers, and kayakers where there are no lifeguards posted, such as Back Beach, Pebble Beach, Loblolly Cove Beach, and Town Wharfs. The same shark sighting/attack response procedures will apply to these areas where ocean swimming and related activities takes place.

I. MEDIA INQUIRIES

If media representatives arrive at the beach following a shark sighting/attack, they should be directed to contact the Rockport Police Department for comments. The Chief of Police will subsequently address all media inquiries regarding the matter.

J. SUGGESTIONS FOR AVOIDING ENCOUNTERS WITH SHARKS

- 1.) Always swim in a group. Sharks most often attack lone individuals.
- 2.) Avoid swimming near seals or schools of fish, as sharks see them as a food source.
- 3.) Don't wander too far from shore, as doing so isolates you and places you away from assistance.
- 4.) Avoid the water at night, dawn, or dusk. Sharks are most active at these times and are better able to find you than you are to see them.
- 5.) Don't enter the water if bleeding. Sharks can smell and taste blood, and trace it back to its source.
- 6.) Don't wear shiny jewelry. The reflected light looks like shining fish scales.
- 7.) Don't go into waters containing sewage. Sewage attracts bait fishes, which in turn attract sharks.
- 8.) Avoid waters being fished and those with lots of bait fishes. Diving seabirds are good indicators of such activities.

- 9.) Don't enter the water if sharks are present. Leave immediately if sharks are seen.
- 10.) Avoid an uneven tan and brightly colored clothing. Sharks see contrast particularly well, so use extra caution when waters are cloudy.
- 11.) Don't splash a lot. Also, keep pets out of the water. Erratic movements can attract sharks.
- 12.) Use care near sandbars or steep drop-offs. These are favorite hangouts for sharks.
- 13.) If attacked by a shark, the general rule is "Do whatever it takes to get away." Some people have successfully chosen to be aggressive, others passive. If you are able to strike the shark in the nose and/or eyes do so with force. These are vulnerable areas on a shark and may interrupt the attack.
<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/fish/discover/sharks/avoid-attacks/>

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